TOP SECRET

25 February 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR: SA/DDI - Mr. Komer

FROM: ONE/FE - H. P. Ford

SUBJECT: Quick FE thoughts on Memo for the NSC Board Assistants on "Problems Illustrated by Recent Developments in the Near East and the Taiwan Straits," dated 19 February 1959.

The following additional problems, arising out of the offshore islands crisis, deserve consideration:

1. Policy, for para. I-A of text. The two opposing arguments, as stated, are samewhat in the nature ships passing in the night -since they pose firmness of US purpose against lack of allied support
for the US position re the offshore islands. Both of these arguments
are valid, and not necessarily as contradictory to one another as
presented in the text. Para. I-A might better hang its key first
sentence not on US prestige and maintenance of the Nat position on
the offshore islands, but, more accurately, on US prestige in not
permitting Communist expansion by force. The crisis also demonstrated
that the crisis potential is still there. The Coms. still want the
islands, they are still within artillery range, the Coms still hold
the strategic initiative.



TOP SECRET

- 2. There is no question, once heavy Com shooting is underway, about the need for a forceful US response. However, the question might be discussed as to whether -- during a time in which there is no heavy Com military pressures -- it might not be possible to review the value of holding the offshore islands. It does not seem inconceivable that such policy review could come up with ways and means which would result in allied and world respect for both US power and judgment.
- 3. Flexibility of US military operation plans. Para. III does not include the clearest lesson of the offshore island crisis: that military operation plans must be on hand for all types of possible responses. The military commanders in the field cannot make the political judgments for the White House, and must have the plans and the capabilities to move into any situation ordered by Washington.
- 4. The need for prior contingency planning in Washington.

 Section IV should include the finding that prior contingency planning could have lessened the panic aspect of last summers' crises. Also, it should be anticipated that from time to time in the future the US may be hit with simultaneous crises -- Far East, Near East, Berlin, and etc. -- and must be able to give attention to each of them at that



TOP SECRET

time, without having a disproportionate amount of time and energies drained off to only the first or the second of the crises which appear.

5. Assessment of enemy intentions in time of crisis. Section

IV should also discuss the increased difficulties of, but greater

need for, quick and accurate assessment of enemy intentions. The

panic attending the crises of last summer had the effect at times

of leading some Washington observers to an overly-alarmist view of

Soviet intentions in the Middle East and of Chinese Communist intentions

with respect to the seizure of the offshore islands. In addition,

the Far East crisis showed the need for the most careful assessment

of one's ally's assessment of ememy intentions, so that the US may

not be misled in some future crisis by the inaccuracies, biases, or

aspirations of its allies.

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